

The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King and the "Raoul" Mystery: Are We Being Sidetracked?

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"Some people have a Pollyanna view of the legal system."

— James Earl Ray

Although David Lifton and Jeff Cohen are certainly committed, honest researchers, there is considerable reason to believe that their "New Times" article postulating Jerry Ray masquerading as the infamous "Raoul" in the King assassination is fallacious and misinformative. A cursory overview of this question could show that such a thesis is highly doubtful, particularly when there is hard evidence, not generally known to the public because of the negligence or outright deceit of the news media, that there is indeed a Raoul and his actions fit the scenario outlined by James Earl Ray.

It may be important to consider why the Lifton-Cohen thesis cannot hold up simply from a logical standpoint, especially given what has transpired recently in the King case.

First, if the executive agencies sensed that Ray's brother was involved in the case, it seems rather certain they would have publicized the point because (a) the role of the younger Ray would have provided a plausible "conspiracy theory" to the plot-minded already aware of the great discrepancies in the case against James Earl Ray and (b) this sort of plot would easily fulfill the schematic already mapped out by the FBI, i.e., that James Earl Ray was motivated by racist and pathological impulses to murder Dr. King. In this new context James and Jerry Ray could easily be groomed to appear as the new James brothers, on a berserk rampage against black leaders while involved in a life of larceny and mayhem. This provides a marketable "limited" conspiracy which dissuades future investigations from going higher or lower in a pursuit of the facts.

Second (and more important), the involvement of Jerry Ray tends to presuppose (according to the Lifton-Cohen view) connections between Ray and one or more of the federal agencies previously under scrutiny by researchers for their campaigns against blacks and their cover-ups of black murders. According to Harold Weisberg's research for his book "Frame-Up", Ray stated he met Raoul in Montreal, New Orleans and Laredo, Mexico and obtained large sums of money from him at each locale. The cities alone may be important since researchers have visited each, over the past decade, concerning investigations into the JFK assassination and numerous mercenary activities. Keeping in mind the point that Raoul's supposed interest in Ray included smuggling and various mercenary-associated activities (with a third party intervening), one must ask whether Jerry Ray has the professional credentials for this kind of work.

The question of the third party is another problem. According to evidence developed by Wayne Chastain, one-time soldier of fortune and military in-

telligence operative Jack Youngblood is a prime suspect in the King assassination. Suppose that James Earl Ray's gunrunning story of the accomplice (Youngblood) and Raoul is in any way accurate, then one must establish Jerry Ray's involvement with the whole CIA-funded, anti-Castro mercenary underground that has been emerging as the partial underpinning of the King murder, just as it is for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Lifton and Cohen establish a link between Jerry Ray and the National States Rights Party; but to assume that racist inclinations automatically prove a person capable of murder is to perpetrate the kind of thinking always peddled by officialdom and the "authorized" chroniclers of these tragedies. The real critique of the Lifton-Cohen thesis, however, is far more substantive.

The Witnesses and the Sketch

The person James Earl Ray calls "Raoul" surfaced the day Martin Luther King was assassinated. Several witnesses saw a man running out of the rooming house from which the police and FBI eventually believed the shot that killed Dr. King had been fired. The man carried a bundle containing a rifle, binoculars, shaving kit and other items easily traced to James Earl Ray; the man dropped the bundle in front of Guy Canipe's amusement parlor, got into a white Mustang, and was driven away. Three witnesses who saw this man, Bessie Brewer, Guy Canipe and Grace Stephens, provided descriptions to the FBI. The FBI contacted a police artist in Mexico City and gave the three descriptions over the phone, requesting that Mexican authorities provide sketches to their police since it was believed the man might turn up at a border airport. The police artist made sketch from the three descriptions using a facial component technique developed in Europe but not yet used by the FBI. The artist claims it is far superior to most U.S. methods and can be done by telephone. /1/

There were actually two sketches made for or by the FBI. The second was made by police in Tennessee and was dissimilar to the Mexican sketch. The Mexican sketch became the one used on television and newspapers as well as on FBI circulars — neither of the sketches resembled James Earl Ray.

"Frenchy"

Forty minutes after President Kennedy was assassinated in Dealey Plaza a freight train was seen leaving the railroad yards behind the stockade fence and grassy knoll area on the northern side of the Plaza. A deputy sheriff told Lee Bowers, a supervisor in the control tower, to stop the train. It



Figure 1. On the left, the tramp photograph of "Frenchy". The police sketch of "Raoul" is on the right.

should be noted that at the time of the shooting Bowers saw two men behind the fence on the knoll, and he also saw "a flash of light or something" coming from that area as the shots were fired.

The freight train was halted and three tramps were discovered on board one of the box cars; they were escorted across Dealey Plaza to the sheriff's office in the Criminal Courts Building by Officers Marvin Wise and Billy Bass. Although no record of this arrest was kept, three Dallas newspaper photographers, George Smith, William Allen and Jack Beers, took seven pictures of the "tramps" in custody. The Warren Commission did not identify these men and never published the photographs. These photographs were generally unknown until the time of the Jim Garrison-Clay Shaw affair in New Orleans. The co-author of this article, Richard E. Sprague, dubbed one of the tramps "Frenchy" because of the continental cut of his jacket, his tight pants and overall European demeanor. At the time of the Shaw trial, intensive private investigations were begun to uncover the real identity of "Frenchy" and his possible connections to the Kennedy killing.

Finally investigators were put on a path that would culminate in today's knowledge of wide-spread attempts by the CIA to overthrow Cuban premier Fidel Castro and reclaim his country in a "second Bay of Pigs." Gerry Patrick Hemming, a CIA contract employee in mercenary training, with anti-Castro Cuban exiles and American soldiers-of-fortune on No Name Key in Florida, told researchers that "Frenchy" was another mercenary working from a yacht owned by anti-Castro,

sympathizer Larry LaBorde. "Frenchy" apparently used several Latin-sounding aliases (it was determined he was really French-Canadian) and his true name was probably unknown even to his close associates, who turned out to be three men also deeply involved in questions concerning the JFK killing: William Seymour, Loran Hall and Lawrence Howard.

The Sketch and the Tramp Photo

Researcher Jeff Paley, who had been working with co-author Sprague on the tramp photos, saw on television the police sketch used after the King murder. Sprague also saw the sketch telecast in a different part of the country and both men had the same reaction immediately: that Frenchy was the man in the sketch. Sprague immediately made a comparison of the best photo of Frenchy where the facial angle was the same as the sketch, enlarging both photo and sketch to the exact same format. See Figure 1. The similarity was not only striking, as Figure 1 demonstrates, but also it was so strong as to make one conclude the sketch was made from the tramp photograph itself.

Paley's Trip to Memphis

It is important to recall that the sketch of the King "killer" was broadcast and published long before the names Galt, Sneyd, or Ray were known. It was released, in fact, only a short time after the assassination. Jeff Paley, having some travel resources from his newspaper employer "L'Express" in Paris, decided to go to Memphis to conduct an inves-

tigation as part of his continuing story on the Kennedy and King assassinations. He went to Memphis possessing five of the "Frenchy" photos plus the sketch, with the hope of talking to the witnesses who had seen the supposed assassin.

Paley was able to talk only to Bessie Brewer, the landlady at the rooming house where Ray stayed, who would not unlock the screen door during the conversation. Mrs. Brewer said the FBI had instructed her not to discuss the case with anyone. Although Paley said he wanted her merely to identify some pictures, she said she could not even cooperate that far. Paley then held up the photos and suddenly Mrs. Brewer was looking at Frenchy through the screen. She obviously recognized the man in the photograph as would any of the three witnesses since they, in effect, created the police drawing.

Paley then took photos and sketch to the Memphis police. They told him to go to the FBI who, by then, were in full control of the King investigation. Paley went to the FBI office in Memphis and presented the sketch and photo that Sprague had prepared to the officer in charge. The officer immediately pushed the pictures across the desk and although Paley protested that he was ignoring important new evidence, the agent refused to deal with the questions and discontinued the conversation. Paley gave up further efforts and returned to New York.

Publication of the Photo and Sketch

San Francisco researcher and former FBI agent William Turner began a campaign with the co-author Sprague to circulate the story of the resemblance of Frenchy to the police sketch. In June of 1968, when James Earl Ray had been found and returned to the U.S., Sprague, with the help of Turner, the "San Francisco Chronicle" and researcher Trent Gough, managed to publish the photo and sketch in "The New York Times". Bill Turner later published an article in "Ramparts" containing the pictures, and Harold Weisberg used them in the appendix of his well-researched study of the case, "Frame-Up".

William Bradford Huie

It is disturbing that Lifton and Cohen referred to author William Bradford Huie (along with Gerold Franck and Harold McMillan) as a source for their recent article. Huie, although previously a socially conscious crusader on behalf of Sergeant Alvin York, Ernie Slovik and Iwo Jima war hero Ira Hayes, has proven to be a thorn in the side for people interested in the truth of the King assassination. Huie contracted to write James Earl Ray's story in the fall of 1968 after a deal had been worked out between Huie and Ray's lawyer, Percy Foreman. By the end of that year Huie had published two articles in "Look" magazine with a third scheduled for early 1969. In the first two installments Huie stated he believed there was a conspiracy and that Ray had been set up as a patsy by a man Ray had already identified as Raoul. Huie printed in some detail Ray's story of how Raoul had recruited him in Montreal to smuggle drugs across both the Canadian and Mexican borders. Huie believed that Raoul had Ray buy the rifle used in the assassination and then told Ray to go to the rooming house in Memphis with the white Mustang purchased with money also provided by Raoul. Huie was also convinced of Ray's account that reported Raoul coming out of the rooming house after the shooting, dropping a bundle on the sidewalk, jumping into the back seat of the Mustang driven by Ray, then leaving the car as the two approached the outskirts of Mem-

phis. Raoul told Ray to meet him later in Atlanta and Ray also told Huie that various bar maids in Atlanta and Montreal had seen Raoul and Ray together on several occasions. Not only did Huie believe all of this, he titled his original book "THEY Slew the Dreamer".

Huie's Interviews with Trent Gough and Richard E. Sprague

Huie announced plans to visit New York in early 1969 after publishing his first two articles in "Look" and before he had stated anything other than his belief in a conspiracy and the existence of Raoul. Trent Gough and the co-author made arrangements for two interviews with Huie, during which Huie stated he knew Raoul existed because he had located three bar maids in Atlanta and Montreal who had seen Raoul and Ray sitting together for several hours over drinks. They had identified Ray from police pictures and Raoul from the sketch which had been shown to them by Huie, along with the description of Raoul personally given Huie by Ray. Huie gave Gough and Sprague one conclusion: there was a conspiracy, Ray had fired no shots and was framed by the man known then only as "Raoul".

Huie and the Frenchy Photos

Sprague later presented the five photos of Frenchy along with the sketch and comparison to Huie for examination. He was visibly shaken. Huie had neither seen nor heard of the tramp photos up to that time and neither did lawyer Percy Foreman. Huie agreed to take the photos back to Foreman to see if Ray could identify Raoul as one of the men in the pictures. At this exact point, something triggered a marked change in attitude in both Huie and Foreman regarding the idea of conspiracy. From this time forward Huie and Foreman dropped all statements regarding a plot to kill Dr. King, and, even more interesting, in the existence of Raoul. When Huie published his third article he treated Raoul as a figment of Ray's imagination, failing to mention that he had told researchers he found witnesses who had seen Ray and Raoul together.

A Phone Call to Huie

Shortly after Huie published his third "Look" article, Sprague made arrangements with Trent Gough to place a conference telephone call to Huie in Alabama with Gough taping the conversation. Huie was queried on the matter of the three bar maids; he denied he ever mentioned them at all as he denied any previous belief in the existence of Raoul. He also denied a belief in conspiracy since he was convinced Ray was simply a liar. He stated that he gave the tramp photos to Foreman who in turn had presented them to Ray, although Huie would not say anything of the outcome of this meeting. Sprague and Gough accused Huie of lying, stating that Huie had told different stories on two separate interviews in New York. Huie continued to deny all of his previous statements and became rather abusive on the phone. Trent Gough still possesses the tape of this conversation.

Foreman, Ray, Fensterwald, Lesar and the Frenchy Photos

A long time later, after Bernard Fensterwald and Jim Lesar became Ray's new lawyers, the co-author (Sprague) discovered what had happened with Foreman, Ray and the pictures of the tramps. Foreman showed Ray the pictures in prison, asking if Ray knew any of the men in the photographs and if they played a role

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in the King assassination. When Ray asked for the source of the photos, Foreman replied they had been forwarded by the FBI. Ray then refused any further comments on the pictures whatsoever. After Fensterwald became Ray's attorney, he took the same photos to show Ray at the co-author's suggestion. As soon as Ray saw the pictures, he accused Fensterwald of working for the FBI and again refused any comment on the identity of Raoul. Fensterwald was naturally surprised by this since he did not find out for some time that Foreman had lied when he first explained the origin of the photographs to Ray. Ray believed then as he does now that he was being framed by the FBI and would lose a chance for a new trial or worse if he made a misstatement about the Frenchy photos while in jail. It was only after a new hearing and the appoint of Jim Lesar as his new lawyer that Ray made a positive identification of Frenchy as Raoul, /2/ since Lesar was one of the few men Ray has trusted in this matter.

The Detroit Airport Meeting

Ray eventually hired Memphis lawyer Robert Livingston to assist Lesar and Fensterwald in the preparation of a new case. Livingston became quite familiar with Wayne Chastain, reporter for the "Memphis Press Scimitar" and long-term researcher of the King assassination, who was very familiar with the possibility of Frenchy being Raoul. In 1974 a man acting as an intermediary contacted Fensterwald and said that a group of men had assassinated Dr. King for a large sum of money; the intermediary would give details if plea-bargaining could be arranged. The man said some very wealthy industrialists in Tennessee and Louisiana had planned the murder, offering to pay the assassins a huge amount, but they reneged on part of the deal after Dr. King was dead. In revenge, the assassins were willing to reveal the identities of the plotters and the framing of Ray as the patsy.

The intermediary set up a meeting to discuss terms with Fensterwald and Livingston, with Chastain invited to attend. The meeting took place in the lounge of the Detroit airport. During the meeting Chastain and Livingston each noticed two men pacing on the other side of the lounge as Fensterwald talked to the go-between. Eventually the two men walked by the conference and both Chastain and Livingston spotted Frenchy as one of the two. Fensterwald apparently didn't notice the men during his conversation; at least he never admitted so subsequently. None of the evidence pertaining to Frenchy or the photos was introduced at Ray's hearing.

Conclusions

The conclusions to be drawn from the evidence are as follows:

1. There is a man known to Ray as Raoul.
2. Raoul is Frenchy, not Jerry Ray.
3. Huie and Foreman concealed evidence which could explain the frameup of James Earl Ray.
4. For some reason, Fensterwald did not want James Earl Ray to use the most telling evidence on the involvement of Raoul in the assassination, including the photos and the airport meeting.

Why, one may ask, has Ray been so quiet on the Frenchy matter of late? Certainly this is Ray's most important trump card, and he will not want to waste it on the media until a new trial is imminent or until the House Committee can break the case. Ray could literally tell everything he knows and still spend a life in prison. In Ray's own words (to CBS reporter Dan Rather), "some people have a Pollyanna view of the legal system." □

Notes

- /1/ Interview with Mexican police artist by Richard E. Sprague.
- /2/ Telephone conversation between Jim Lesar and Richard E. Sprague.
- /3/ Telephone conversations between Richard E. Sprague, Wayne Chastain and Robert Livingston.

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same race as these revolutionary cadre and and say that not only have I learned a useful trade here, but I've also been introduced through the courses to a changed life, a new world not only for myself and my family, but for the whole society."

Major Lam Chuo assured me that such attitudes are confirmed by the behavior of the overwhelming majority of those already released.

After an introductory series of lectures, the officers settle down to do manual work of their own choice — either carpentry, tailoring, hair-cutting or rice growing. They have elected a committee to act as liaison with the center's authorities. They receive weekly family visits and whatever food and gifts their families care to bring them. In case of serious illness or death in the family, they are given leave passes for up to one week . . .

Note

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The above on-the-spot report by a veteran Far Eastern journalist refutes to a large extent the many misinformed charges in the American press that the Vietnamese Reeducation Centers are seriously violating human rights. Normal and friendly relations between the United States and Vietnam require that the American people know the truth about the Vietnamese people and their Government. Mr. Burchett, whose veracity has long since been proved, gives us the truth.

Wilfred Burchett's article written from Vietnam is one in a series on Vietnam Since Liberation currently appearing exclusively in the "Guardian News-weekly".

Concerned Americans are urged to write their local newspaper demanding that it print the full truth about Vietnam. □